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Report Highlights:

This is the GAIN version of the 1998 FAIRS Report for the U.A.E. which was previously forwarded in June 1998 to FAS Washington on diskette. It provides valuable information on local food laws, labelling requirements, use of additives and preservatives, standards, trademarks, import procedures and contact information.

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Disclaimer: This report has been prepared by the Agricultural Trade Office of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Dubai, UAE for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care has been taken in the preparation of this report, the information provided may not be completely accurate either because policies have changed since its preparation or clear and consistent information was not available. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters verify all import requirements with local authorities through their importers, before sales conditions are finalized and goods are shipped. **FINAL IMPORT APPROVAL OF ANY PRODUCT IS SUBJECT TO THE RULES AND REGULATIONS AS INTERPRETED BY THE COUNTRY OF IMPORT AT THE TIME OF PRODUCT ENTRY.**

Please contact this office, if you have any comments, corrections or suggestions about the material contained in this report. Our e-mail address is: atodubai@fas.usda.gov.

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A. FOOD LAW OVERVIEW

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Other members are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The GCC is slowly harmonizing food safety standards, including labeling and shelf-life standards. Still, member countries enjoy significant autonomy when it comes to implementing regional requirements. Many members selectively enforce GCC regulations and establish their own standards when they disagree with regional requirements.

In the UAE, food safety regulations are set by the General Secretariat of Municipalities (GSM), based on recommendations from its Technical Committee (TC). For the most part, local regulation are based on GCC standards. The TC is comprised of food laboratory directors from the four major UAE municipalities and representatives from the office of the Secretary General of the GSM, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health and the Standard and Measurements Department of the Ministry of Finance and Industry

The health departments of each municipality are responsible for enforcing food safety standards. In general, each municipality has a food control division and a health laboratory for this purpose. While information is shared between municipalities, they operate independently. The municipalities of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah are the major entry points for imported food products.

Food products are regularly inspected at the time of import and at the point of sale. Fines are levied and products destroyed for severe violations. Imported and locally produced products face the same food safety regulations. There are no environmental laws regulating food product packaging.

The UAE is a growing market for high value food products. It is free trade oriented with few non-tariff trade barriers. Shelf-life standards and the need for production as well as expiry dates on most food products seem to be the major regulatory barriers facing U.S. suppliers.

Because of changing regulations and the enforcement autonomy of member countries, exporters are strongly encouraged to work closely with their importers to obtain pre-export label and product clearance.

B. LABELING REQUIREMENTS

For the most part, the UAE enforces Gulf Standard (GS) 9/1995, regulating food labels. A major exception to this standard is that the UAE accepts English-only labels and does not require Arabic labeling on food products. Since this is an Arab country, however, and many products are re-exported to neighboring countries, suppliers are encouraged to provide bilingual labels (e.g. Arabic/English) or Arabic stickers containing crucial label information.

In general, a standard U.S. label meets most local labeling requirements. The production date requirement is a key difference. Under current UAE regulations, a food label must contain the following information:

- Product and brand names;
- Ingredients in descending order of proportion;
- Additives using their “E” numbers (group names are accepted, see appendix B.);
- The origin of all animal fats;
- Net content in metric units;
- Production and expiry dates (see below for details);
- Country of origin;
- Manufacturer’s name and address;
- Special storage and preparation instructions, if any.

In general, products shipped in bulk and institutional-size containers must comply with all labeling regulations. For example, bulk cartons of fresh fruits and vegetables must contain most label information, but need not carry production/expiry dates.

Labels for specialty foods such as diet, health and baby foods must contain detailed information about the product's vitamin and mineral content, nutritive value per 100 grams and proper use and storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable and there are no RDA label requirements. In general, U.S. nutritional labeling is acceptable and may eventually be the basis for local nutritional labeling standards.

The importation and sale of pork and pork containing products is permitted, but strictly regulated. Labels for such products must clearly state that the product contains pork. No food labels can contain pictures of, nor recipes listing pork or alcohol.

Labels for pet foods must be printed in Arabic. Arabic/English labels are permitted, as are Arabic stickers in lieu of Arabic labels. The label must contain the statement, “Not fit for human consumption”. Production/expiry dates are required for pet foods.

The UAE enforces GS 150/1993, Part I, regulating shelf-life durations for approximately 90 food products. Under GS 150, production/expiry dates for selected products must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. These dates may not be printed on stickers. U.S. bar coding is not permitted in lieu of P/E dates and a label may not carry more than one set of P/E dates. P/E dates must be printed in the following order, depending upon the shelf-life of the product:

- Day/month/year for products with a shelf-life of 6 months or less;
- Month/year for products with a shelf-life longer than 6 months.

Under the month/year format, the last day of the month is considered the expiry date. The month may be printed in numbers or letters. For example, both 3/97 and March 97 are acceptable formats.

The production date must be preceded by the word “Production” or the letter “P”. The expiry date must be preceded by one of the following statements: “Expiration (date)”; “Use by (date)”; “Use before (date)”; “Sell by (date)”; “Valid until (date) from the date of production”; or the letter “E”.

With few exceptions, a product must have at least one-half of its shelf-life remaining at the time of import. Frozen meat and poultry products must be imported within 4 months of their date of production, regardless of the length of their shelf-life.

The following products are specifically exempt from expiration dates: salt, white sugar, dry and dried legumes, dried vegetables, spices and other condiments, tea and rice.

Most of the major municipalities offer the following services to facilitate food product imports:

- Pre-shipment inspection of food labels: Copies of labels, can be sent (fax copies are acceptable) directly to inspection officials for review, free-of-charge. If approved, a notice will be issued to accompany the product and facilitate inspection at the time of arrival.

- Pre-shipment inspection of ingredients: For a fee of approximately USD 55.00, officials will analyze a product to determine whether or not it complies with all ingredient requirements.

Occasionally, local health officials will permit the importation of food products with minor labeling infractions. Exemptions are granted on a one-time basis and the sale of such products usually is limited to institutional end users.

C. FOOD ADDITIVE REGULATIONS

The UAE enforces GS 23/1984, regulating the use of food coloring additives. In the absence of a GCC standard, the UAE recognizes international standards (e.g., Codex Alimentarius) or European standards. Rarely is an illegal food additive or ingredient detected in U.S. origin products. Nevertheless, exporters are encourage to work closely with their importers to ensure their products meet all UAE food additive requirements.

D. PESTICIDE AND OTHER CONTAMINANTS

In general, in the absence of local standards the UAE recognizes Codex Alimentarius standards governing pesticide and other contaminate residue levels. Chemical contamination is a growing concern among UAE authorities and efforts are underway to update local standards and improve testing procedures. Food products meeting U.S. residue standards will most likely meet future UAE standards. U.S. origin products are rarely rejected due to pesticide and other contaminant residues.

E. OTHER REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

All imported food products must be accompanied by a health certificate issued by the appropriate government agency in the country of origin, attesting to the product's fitness for human consumption. In addition, all meat and poultry products must be accompanied by an Islamic (Halal) slaughter certificate issued by a UAE-approved Islamic center in the country of origin. These and certain other import documents must be notarized by the Arab-American Chamber of Commerce and the UAE embassy or one of its consulates in the country of origin.

There are no special packaging or container size requirements for food products. A radiation-free certificate is required for food products from Europe and Asia. U.S. products are exempt from this requirement. The UAE does not allow the importation of irradiated food products.

There are no specific requirements for imported food samples. Samples for food shows and other promotional events are routinely exempt from local labeling and shelf-life requirements. Product samples must be clearly marked as samples and accompanied by a statement claiming that they are not for sale.

F. OTHER SPECIFIC STANDARDS

Other than the labeling requirements noted above, there are no special standards for specialty food products such as baby, diet or health foods.

Inspection officials routinely check for salmonella in poultry products. A shipment will be rejected for import if salmonella is detected in more than 20 percent of tested samples.

Imports of alcoholic beverages are strictly controlled. Only a few local companies are licensed to import and sell alcoholic beverages. These products are exempt from local labeling requirements. The import of non-alcoholic beverages is permitted, but these products cannot contain more than 0.05 percent of alcohol by volume. These products are also exempt from local labeling requirements.

The sale of pork products is strictly regulated and confined to well-marked areas of supermarkets. Restaurants must clearly state on the menu which products contain pork. Only selected retail outlets and hotels are permitted to sell pork.

The UAE Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) is responsible for regulating the importation of live animals and plants.

G. COPYRIGHT OR TRADEMARK LAWS

The UAE has significantly tightened protection of trademarks and brand names. Registration of trade marks is not required but, protection may be limited unless a brand is officially registered. Trademark infringements are rare in the food sector.

Trademark registration is the responsibility of the Trademark Section, Ministry of Economy and Commerce. A foreign company may contact the ministry directly to register a product. To speed the process, however, it is recommended that a local law firm be hired.

Sole agency agreements for food brand names are no longer permitted in the UAE. This means that a local company can no longer register itself with the government as the exclusive importer/distributor of a specific brand. Agencies registered prior to June 1996, however, will continue to be recognized.

H. IMPORT PROCEDURE

The UAE boasts some of the most modern air and sea port facilities in the world. Food shipments usually are off loaded, cleared through customs and inspected by health officials within hours of arrival in any of the major ports. (Dubai is the primary port of import for most food products.)

Every food shipment is subject to visual inspection upon arrival to ensure compliance with labeling and shelf-life regulations. Shipments are also subject to random laboratory analysis. Exceptions are shipments of baby foods and edible oils which are sampled each time they are imported. A consignment selected for laboratory analysis is usually permitted to be stored under bond in a warehouse selected by the importer. Lab results are generally known within 7-10 days. New-to-market food products are subject to thorough laboratory analysis. If cleared, they are randomly sampled thereafter.

Products found unfit for human consumption must be destroyed. Otherwise, a condemned shipments can be destroyed or re-exported within 30 days, at the importers discretion. Products cleared for re-export usually cannot be shipped to another GCC country. Fines may also be imposed depending on the severity of the violation.

An importer may appeal a rejection to health officials in the municipality in which the product was rejected. A special committee within the municipality reviews each case. A final decision is usually announced within a few days to one week. The committee's decision is final.

In cases of minor infractions, a shipment may be allowed entry on a one-time basis for limited sale, for example to institutional end-users only. Major infractions, such as improper labeling of pork-containing products or tampering with P/E dates, are severely punished, particularly those discovered after import. Such products are automatically banned from import, usually for several months, and the brand name and importer are often reported in the press.

In sum, with the exception of shelf-life standards and production/expiry regulations for selected products, UAE food safety requirements are based on international standards and do not appear to vary significantly from many U.S. standards.

I. APPENDIX A - MAJOR REGULATORY AGENCIES

Federal Government Contacts:

H. E. Jassim M. Darwish Oversight of food safety technical
Secretary General committee
General Secretariat of UAE Municipalities
P.O. box 5665
Dubai, UAE
Tel: (9714) 237-785; Fax: (9714) 236-136

Mr. Abdul Motti Al Halwani Standards and specification issues
Ministry of Finance and Industry
Standards and Specifications Department
P.O. Box 1565
Dubai, UAE
Tel: (9712) 726-000; Fax: (9712) 779-771

Ms. Nelly Ayed Trademark and copy right issues
Ministry of Economy and Commerce
Trademark Section
P.O. Box 901
Abu Dhabi, UAE
Tel: 9712/265-000; Fax: 9712/215-339

Dr. Ali Arab Live animal imports
Director, Animal Wealth Department
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
P.O. Box 1509
Dubai, UAE
Tel: 9714/228-161; Fax: 9714/232-781

Mr. Mohammed M. Abdalla Plant imports
Head, Plant Quarantine Division
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
P.O. Box 1509
Dubai, UAE
Tel: 9714/662-781; Fax: 9714/654-787

Municipality Contacts: Recommend as first point of contact for food import requirements and pre-export certification of labels and ingredients.

Mr. Khalid M. Sharif
Head, Food Control Section

Dubai Municipality
P.O. Box 67
Dubai, UAE
Tel: 9714/212-842; Fax: 9714/231-905

Dr. Amin M. Yousuf
Director, Food and Environment
Control Center
Abu Dhabi Municipality
P.O. Box 3111
Abu Dhabi, UAE
Tel: 9712/725-008; Fax: 9712/785-961

Dr. Abdul K. Ahmed
Head, Central Food Control Lab
Sharjah Municipality
P.O. Box 22
Sharjah, UAE
Tel: 9716/524-017; Fax: 9716/523-612

APPENDIX B - FOOD ADDITIVES LIST**COLORINGS**

E-NUMBER MG/KG B.W	DESCRIPTION	COLOR INDEX NUMBER	ADI
E 100	Curcumin	75300	
E 120	Cochineal	75470	
E 140	Chlorophyll	75810	
E 141 0-15	Copper Complexes of Chlorophyll &Chlorophyll lines		
E 150	Caramel		
E 160	Carotenoide B-Carotene	75130 40800	
E 160b 0- 0.065	Annatto, Bixin, Norbixin		
E 160e 0-5	B-Apo-8 Carotenal	40820	
E 160g 0-25	Canthexanthin	40850	
E 162	Beetroot red (Betanin) Saffron		
E 171	Titanium Dioxide	77891	
E 172	Iron oxides	77489	
E 173	Aluminum	77000	
E 174	Silver	77820	
E 175	Gold	77480	
E 102 0-7.5	Tatrazine (yellow #5)	19140	
E 104	Quinoline yellow (yellow #11)	47005	
E 110	Sunset yellow FCF (yellow #6)	15985	
E 122	Azorubine (Carmoisine)	14720	
E 124	Ponceau 4R (red 2)	16255	
E 127	Erythrosine (red 3)	45430	
E 128	Red 2G	18050	
E 129 0-7.0	Allura red (red 17)	16035	

E 132	Indigo Carmine (indigotone)(Blue #2)	73015	
0-5.0	Brilliant Blue FCF (Blue #1)	42090	
	Fast green FCF (green #3)	42053	
0-12.5	Brilliant Black PN (Black #1)	28440	
	Chocolate brown HT (Brown #3)	20285	

PRESERVATIVES E-NUMBER	NAME	ADI
E 200	Sorbic Acid	0-25
E 201	Sodium Sorbate	0-25
E 202	Potassium Sorbate	0-25
E 203	Calcium Sorbate	0-25
E 210	Benzoic Acid	0-5
E 211	Sodium Benzoate	0-5
E 212	Potassium Benzoate	0-5
E 213	Calcium Benzoate	0-5
E 214	Ethyl-P-Hydroxy Benzoate	0-10
E 216	Propyl-P-Hydroxy Benzoate	0-10
E 218	Methyl-P-Hydroxy Benzoate	0-10
E 220	Sulphur dioxide	0-0.7
E 221	Sodium Sulfite	0-0.7
E 222	Sodium Bisulphite	0-0.7
E 223	Sodium Meta Bisulphite	0-0.7
E 224	Potassium Meta Bisulphite	0-0.7
E 226	Calcium sulfite	0-0.7
E 227	Calcium Bisulphite	0-0.7
E 249	Potassium Nitrate	0-0.2
E 250	Sodium Nitrite	0-0.2
E 252	Potassium Nitrate	0-5
E 260	Acetic Acid	Not limited
E 280	Propionic Acid	Not limited
E 281	Sodium Propionate	Not limited
E 282	Calcium Propionate	Not limited
E 283	Potassium Propionate	Not limited
E 290	Carbon Dioxide	Not limited

ANTIOXIDANTS		
E 304	Ascorbyl Palmitate	0-1.25
E 306	Natural Tocopherol Mixture	0-2
E 307	-Tocopherol	0-2
E 308	-Tocopherol	0-2
E 309	-Tocopherol	0-2
E 310	Propyl Gallate (PG)	0-0.2
E 311	Octyl Gallate (OG)	0-0.2
E 312	Dodecyl Gallate (DG)	0-0.2
E 320	Butylated Hydroxyanisole (BHA)	0-0.5
E 321	Butylated Hydroxy toluene (BHT)	